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The Christian Ministry Overseas

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STUDENT VOLUNTEER MOVEMENT

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THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY OVERSEAS

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The real work of the Christian ministry overseas has often been obscured by the use of the term evangelistic. At home, the evangelist is engaged in one specialized and, on the whole, rather limited form of work, a form not especially connected with the broader and more regular opportunities of the ministry. It is but natural that students familiar with this use of the term should be inclined to interpret the word in its application to work overseas in the same general way. But, as a matter of fact, the term as used abroad is applied to a ministry broader and more varied than that of the whole work of the ministry in the home land.

The ministry overseas is in reality the most varied and wide ranged of all the types of work which combined make the work of foreign missions the broadest and most inclusive presentation of the whole scope of Christianity which the world has ever known. To be an evangelist overseas is to enter upon large tasks and to face big problems,—larger tasks and bigger problems than most men face in any form of Christian work in the homeland.

To begin with, the ministers overseas are the pioneers. To them falls the alluring task of exploring the unknown fields. Sometimes, as in the case of Livingstone, it is the doctor who leads the way; but it is usually because he has assumed the functions of the minister in addition to those of a doctor that he becomes the pioneer. I asked a missionary familiar with the history of missionary pioneering in Africa to give me the names of a score of men who had done extensive pioneering work. All but three or four were ministers. Dr. McGilvary, who worked for many years in Siam, is a typical example of this side of the ministry overseas. When he began his work, a large part of Siam was "unoccupied territory" from the missionary point of view. He made long trips of exploration, covering North Siam, Eastern Burma, and the present French Lao State—an area equal to that of the states of New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. In one of his trips he stumbled upon a village whose people spoke a tongue different from that of the Siamese. He learned from what section they had come and, working his way far north into the Lao States, became the pioneer not only of missionary effort but of practically all the good things that our Western civilization has to offer the peoples of the East.

As a pioneer the minister overseas lays founda-

tions. Dr. Brown speaks of the work of Dr. McGilvary in these terms :

“In all the marked development of the Lao Mission, Dr. McGilvary was a leader—the leader. He laid the foundations of medical work, introducing quinine and vaccination among a people scourged by malaria and smallpox, a work which has now developed into five hospitals and a leper asylum. He began educational work, which is now represented by eight boarding schools and twenty-two elementary schools, and is fast expanding into a college, a medical college, and a theological seminary. He was the evangelist who won the first converts, founded the first church, and had a prominent part in founding twenty other churches, and in developing a Lao Christian Church of four thousand two hundred and five adult communicants. His colleague, the Rev. W. C. Dodd, says that Dr. McGilvary selected the sites for all the present stations of the Mission long before committees formally sanctioned the wisdom of his choice. He led the way into regions beyond, and was the pioneer explorer into the French Lao States, eastern Burma, and even up to China. Go where you will in northern Siam, or in many of the sections of the extra-Siamese Lao States, you will find men and women to whom Dr. McGilvary first brought the Good News. He well deserves the name so frequently given him even in his lifetime,—‘The Apostle to the Lao.’ ”

It will perhaps come as a surprise to those who have not been close students of missions to learn that there is still a great demand for just such pioneering work. A survey now being conducted by the Inter-church World Movement has revealed the tremendous extent of territory which is still unoccupied in any definite way by the missionary enterprise. Within the bounds of China proper, there are sections as large as the states of Connecticut and Massachusetts combined in which the whole Christian movement is yet to be launched; and, putting together all these areas within China proper, it has been discovered that they have an extent and contain a population equal to that of the following states combined:

Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Kentucky, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa.

Then, stretching westward from China, are the great regions of Tibet, Sinkiang (Chinese Turkestan) and Mongolia, with an area greater than that of the United States east of the Missouri River, in which only the beginning of work has been done.

In the Sudan of Africa, there is a region where one could travel today in a direct line from the farthest outpost in the east for fifteen hundred miles before he would reach the first station of the line thrown out from the west. In this region, as in North Africa as a whole, there is added to the attraction of pioneering something of the challenge of battle. For

here, perhaps, more than anywhere else in the world, Christianity is face to face with a militant opponent. The Moslem advance has long since swept over North Africa and now creeps steadily down into and almost through Central Africa, while Christianity awaits the men with courage and spirit to go out into the African jungles and hold the line.

The call for the pioneer comes from nearly all parts of the overseas field. The great interior of Brazil with its millions of Indians, Afghanistan closed still to all white men, and Arabia, which apart from the coast is known little better than Africa was a generation ago—all these are parts of the great unoccupied field, which throws out a challenge to the student of today.

It must be remembered of course that pioneering is hard work. It may sound romantic, but the romance is a small part of the real thing. A man to do this work must be able to stand physical hardships. He must be able to live much alone; for pioneers do not go in large companies nor carry along the comforts of civilization. But, if the men can be found, there will be more real pioneering done in the next ten or fifteen years than in any past generation; in fact, this may be the last call for pioneering missionaries.

Most ministers, overseas, however, are not pioneers in this large sense, for the majority go to fields

already opened for Christian work. This means only a more varied life and a wider range of service. The minister has always been closer to the life of the land in which he works than the other workers. He and the doctor come into contact with all classes of people while the educator as a rule meets selected individuals often drawn from limited classes. The minister comes to know all the problems of the people, and, because of this, while sticking to his primary task of building up a church which will sometime be strong enough to take the whole Christian responsibility on itself, he is driven almost inevitably to a broad conception of the function of the Church and the scope of the Christian movement. He is likely to be a strong supporter of the work of the schools and indeed to have an active part in them. Many of the strongest educational institutions were founded by ministers whose training in the so-called evangelistic work fitted them for leadership in education. And perforce every minister overseas is a social worker.

My personal knowledge is confined to China, but conditions are probably not very different on other overseas fields where the work is well organized; and one of the striking facts in China is the marked extent to which this ordinary work of the ministry overseas has proved to be the most effective training for large leadership. There are five mission schools of college grade in the lower Yangtse valley. At

least four of the presidents of these colleges were called to their posts from successful work in the ministry. Shangtung University has throughout its history filled its presidential post in this way. The newly organized Peking University went outside the limits of all the missions organically connected with the school, but chose a man who, in the first instance, had gotten his touch with China and his knowledge of the Chinese as a minister. The same is true of the chief executive positions of a general or national nature in the missionary enterprise. The China Continuation Committee, a general advisory and consultative body representing the whole missionary movement, is headed by a man trained in this way, and the same is true of bodies such as the China Council of the Northern Presbyterian Missions.

The most important thing about the ministry overseas at the present time is the tremendous nature of the problems which it must face. It must be remembered that in nearly all of the overseas lands conditions are changing with a rapidity and to an extent which leaves the best informed and watchful almost overwhelmed. All Asia is breaking loose from its old moorings. Not in one land, but in practically all lands, there have been changes in the last two decades so enormous that no one can yet measure their significance. The Chinese Republic does not

excite a large amount of admiration, but not even the failures of the government at Peking can hide the importance of the effort which the Chinese people are making. The rise of nationalism in Asia brings problems before which the most optimistic are sober. The relations between the peoples of the East and the West are more strained than for long periods. The tension between China and Japan, the relation of Korea and Japan,—these are world problems.

And the minister overseas will of necessity feel and be in touch with each of these problems. He must be a man of fine tact and of more than usual judgment and self-control, for he will come into the most delicate situations. Many of the problems are of a political nature and there are abundant reasons why he should not become involved in politics; but each of these problems will be found to have another side which is not political but more accurately social, and the minister will be in a position to influence, to guide, and to advise without infringing in any way on the proper limitations inherent in his position.

Each mission land presents a social problem to which one does not wish to apply an adjective lest the superlative degree which must be used appear pure exaggeration. Take Japan as an example. Her economic development is unparalleled in history. A generation ago, she was a self-contained land, whose people tilled their soil and in their homes engaged in

simple home industries. Today, she is one of the great manufacturing lands of the world. In 1900, she had 1,400 factories with 120,000 workers; in 1919, she had 30,000 factories with 2,000,000 employees.

Now the minister overseas faces this situation with a clear conviction that it is part of the function of Christianity to plant in Japanese life the forces which will meet and overcome the host of problems which modern industrial life carries in its train. The great problem of the Church overseas is to apply the gospel to the whole range of human life, Christianizing all the activities of men. It is a bigger and harder work than it is at home.

A much larger part of the responsibility falls upon the Church than is true at home. Here the Church has a hundred aids. In most overseas fields, she still works to a large degree single handed. She must create the public sentiment which will not only add to her own strength but will give rise to social organizations which will aid her in the fight.

In such a task, the minister overseas must take the lead. It was the minister overseas who led and organized the forces in China which overthrew the opium traffic. It was he who was the best aid to the women leaders through whom came the reforms in the practice of foot binding.

The minister overseas must therefore, in our day, be a leader and organizer of social forces. Lands such as China, India, Korea, and Japan have at one and the same time the social and moral problems inherent in their old social status and those which come with the rise of modern economic and political systems. The church overseas must, as a church, launch at once into the great social problems. The Kingdom of God must be established in these overseas lands as truly as men must be brought to life in Christ. It is a larger and a harder task than ministers have had before, but the two-fold responsibility falls without fail on the present day minister overseas. Mission churches will not retain Western denominational names or creeds or dividing lines, and coöperation is assured. Organic church unity in no small degree is likely to come in the near future. The minister must be able to fit into such a movement. The whole Church must command his loyalty more fully than the division to which he belongs.

But the largest work of the minister overseas is deeper even than this, though most intimately connected with it. He comes as a moral and social physician. He knows that each of the evils which he fights, each social problem which he meets, must be fought. As the doctor fights an epidemic of disease, the minister overseas fights the evils of society, whether those inherent in the life of the East or those

brought in from the West. But he has, or should have, the scientific spirit. He should recognize the superior importance of prevention as compared with cure. And while he stands and fights the prevailing epidemic, he plans and works for that which will prevent its reoccurrence. He knows that character in men is the surest support of a good social order. He works for men. He is not greatly concerned about building up a denomination which calls itself by the name he has been associated with. He sees the rise in India, in China, in Japan, in South Africa, of Christian churches in which union is a fact, not the effervescent subject of after-dinner speeches and committee meetings, and he regards it as natural and inevitable. But he is concerned if he notes the lack of real power—power which cannot be supplied by any numbers or any form.

Now it must be clear that the work of the minister overseas is hard. He must have initiative, must be able to adapt himself, his methods, and practices to changing conditions and situations. He is thrown to a tremendous degree on his own resources. One of the problems facing the Christian movement overseas is to supply the ministers needed without lowering the standard below that required by the situation. In the files of the Interchurch Movement, there are now requests for 3,255 ministers, all of whom are needed within the next five years. The present

generation of college men must decide whether the calls are to be met or not.

We have not spoken specifically in this pamphlet of women in evangelistic or "general missionary" work; but most of what has been said applies directly to them. The range of their work is perhaps as broad and it surely is as important and demanding as that done by men in the work of the ministry. It often takes on pioneer aspects; it deals vigorously with social problems, often at their source; it is vitally concerned with laying the foundations of the Church in the Mission field. It reaches multitudes of women whom men workers cannot approach. It penetrates the homes of the non-Christian world with a peculiar influence. And today it is in need of a host of workers, college women of large gifts, thorough training and devoted spirit.

